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FARMING TRENDS IN SOUTH CAROLINA

By Governor J. Strom Thurmond

The young farmer who makes his start on the land in 1950 will find that the agricultural situation in South Carolina has changed greatly since his father's time. A sharp decrease in farm population, and the trend to mechanization, electrification, and vastly different crop methods, are some of the factors which have served to change and improve the agricultural outlook in our State.

In 1920, there were 1,072,479 people living on farms in South Carolina; by 1945, this number had decreased to 682,663. Instead of making up two-thirds of our population as in 1920, farm people now make up only one-third of it.

In spite of this sharp decrease, the production of crops, livestock, and livestock products have reached and maintained new high levels, as our farmers take advantage of labor-saving devices and new methods of scientific farming.

The rapid mechanization of our farms is shown clearly in the increased use of tractors, as compared to the decline in the use of horses and mules. In 1920, there were 1,304 tractors in use in South Carolina. In 1945 there were 12,477 tractors in use, and farm experts say the 1950 census will probably show that the number has grown to nearly 40,000. On the other hand, the number of horses and mules declined from 297,741 in 1920 to 191,000 in 1945, and will probably go below 150,000 in 1950.

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Use of electricity on our farms is also increasing rapidly, and today, over three-fourths ofSouth Carolina farms are electrified. The coming of electricity to the farm means not only a more efficient way of doing the work, but a happier and more comfortable existence for the farm family.

Along with the new emphasis on modern farming has come a corresponding gain in the production of all major crops. The average yield of lint cotton per acre has more than doubled since 1920, and the percentage of cotton 15/16-inch or better has increased from 18½% to 98% during that time. We have reduced the acreage devoted to cotton by half, while at the same time increasing production. (This fact did not hold true in 1949, however, because of the heavy inroads of the boll weevil and other factors, which cost our cotton farmers approximately $60,000,000.)

Similar increases in average yields have been made in production of tobacco, corn, oats, wheat, and in new income-producing crops like peanuts and soybeans. The latter will soon be a million-dollar crop because of a new shatterpruf bean produced by Clemson College which can be harvested successfully. In recent years, South Carolina has taken the lead among states in the shipment of fresh peaches. One South Carolina county ships more fresh peaches than the entire State of Georgia.

Perhaps the most significant development in farming in recent years, and the most encouraging, is that of livestock production. In this activity many experts now see South Carolina's greatest hope for a more prosperous agriculture. The development of year-round pasturing and the increased use of pure-bred stock through artificial insemination make the outlook for livestock production a very hopeful one in this State.

It is my prediction that South Carolina will one day become oneof the greatest livestock-producing states. Some of the factors which make this possible are: we can graze cattle 12 months out of the year; we can raise three crops a year; our good seasons enable us to support an animal on only one acre, whereas in certain areas of the West, 10 to 25 acrea are required to the head; and our mild climate makes it unnecessary to heat cattle barns during the winter months.

The pattern of farming in South Carolina has thus changed materially in the past quarter-century. Our farmers are changing from the traditional cotton-corn system to a more diversified system of crop production, which enables them to do a better job of conserving and improving their soils, to develop new sources of income, and to make more efficient, year-round use of farm labor.

Much has been learned in recent years about soils and their conservation and improvement; proper use of fertilizers; improved varieties of crops; methods of planting and cultivation; control of insects, diseases and parasites; breeding and feeding of farm animals; forest management; grading, packing, processing and marketing farm products; the use of labor-saving machinery and equipment, and other improved practices of farm and home management. Prospects are excellent for a continued steady rise in farm income, and for improved standards of living for our farm population.

The young farmer today will do well to take full advantage of every new method as it develops, and to look upon his choice of a career as a business which requires constant study and attention to skilled management.